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54 Synthetic insecticidal crystal protein gene.

57 Synthetic Bacillus thuringiensis toxin genes designed to be expressed in plants at a level higher than naturally-occurring Bt genes are provided. These genes utilize codons preferred in highly expressed monocot or dicot proteins.

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## SYNTHETIC INSECTICIDAL CRYSTAL PROTEIN GENE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to the field of bacterial molecular biology and, in particular, to genetic engineering by recombinant technology for the purpose of protecting plants from insect pests. Disclosed herein are the chemical synthesis of a modified crystal protein gene from *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *tenebrionis* (Btt), and the selective expression of this synthetic insecticidal gene. Also disclosed is the transfer of the cloned synthetic gene into a host microorganism, rendering the organism capable of producing, at improved levels of expression, a protein having toxicity to insects. This invention facilitates the genetic engineering of bacteria and plants to attain desired expression levels of novel toxins having agronomic value.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

*B. thuringiensis* (Bt) is unique in its ability to produce, during the process of sporulation, proteinaceous, crystalline inclusions which are found to be highly toxic to several insect pests of agricultural importance. The crystal proteins of different Bt strains have a rather narrow host range and hence are used commercially as very selective biological insecticides. Numerous strains of Bt are toxic to lepidopteran and dipteran insects. Recently two subspecies (or varieties) of Bt have been reported to be pathogenic to coleopteran insects: var. *tenebrionis* (Krieg et al. (1983) Z. Angew. Entomol. 96:500-508) and var. *san diego* (Herrnstadt et al. (1986) Biotechnol. 4:305-308). Both strains produce flat, rectangular crystal inclusions and have a major crystal component of 64-68 kDa (Herrnstadt et al. supra; Bernhard (1986) FEMS Microbiol. Lett. 33:261-265).

Toxin genes from several subspecies of Bt have been cloned and the recombinant clones were found to be toxic to lepidopteran and dipteran insect larvae. The two coleopteran-active toxin genes have also been isolated and expressed. Herrnstadt et al. supra clones a 5.8 kb BamHI fragment of Bt var. *san diego* DNA. The protein expressed in *E. coli* was toxic to *P. luteola* (EIM leaf beetle) and had a molecular weight of approximately 83 kDa. This 83 kDa toxin product from the var. *san diego* gene was larger than the 64 kDa crystal protein isolated from Bt var. *san diego* cells, suggesting that the Bt var. *san diego* crystal protein may be synthesized as a larger precursor molecule that is processed by Bt var. *san diego* but not by *E. coli* prior to being formed into a crystal.

Sekar et al. (1987) Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA 84:7036-7040; U.S. Patent Application 108,285, filed October 13, 1987 isolated the crystal protein gene from Btt and determined the nucleotide sequence. This crystal protein gene was contained on a 5.9 kb BamHI fragment (pNSBF544). A subclone containing the 3 kb HindIII fragment from pNSBF544 was constructed. This HindIII fragment contains an open reading frame (ORF) that encodes a 644-amino acid polypeptide of approximately 73 kDa. Extracts of both subclones exhibited toxicity to larvae of Colorado potato beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, a coleopteran insect). 73- and 65-kDa peptides that cross-reacted with an antiserum against the crystal protein of var. *tenebrionis* were produced on expression in *E. coli*. Sporulating var. *tenebrionis* cells contain an immunoreactive 73-kDa peptide that corresponds to the expected product from the ORF of pNSBP544. However, isolated crystals primarily contain a 65-kDa component. When the crystal protein gene was shortened at the N-terminal region, the dominant protein product obtained was the 65-kDa peptide. A deletion derivative, p544Pst-Met5, was enzymatically derived from the 5.9 kb BamHI fragment upon removal of forty-six amino acid residues from the N-terminus. Expression of the N-terminal deletion derivative, p544Pst-Met5, resulted in the production of, almost exclusively, the 65 kDa protein. Recently, McPherson et al. (1988) Biotechnology 6:61-66 demonstrated that the Btt gene contains two functional translational initiation codons in the same reading frame leading to the production of both the full-length protein and an N-terminal truncated form.

Chimeric toxin genes from several strains of Bt have been expressed in plants. Four modified Bt2 genes from var. *berliner* 1715, under the control of the 2' promoter of the *Agrobacterium* TR-DNA, were transferred into tobacco plants (Vaeck et al. (1987) Nature 328:33-37). Insecticidal levels of toxin were produced when truncated genes were expressed in transgenic plants. However, the steady state mRNA levels in the transgenic plants were so low that they could not be reliably detected in Northern blot analysis and hence were quantified using ribonuclease protection experiments. Bt mRNA levels in plants producing the highest level of protein corresponded to  $\approx 0.0001\%$  of the poly(A)<sup>+</sup> mRNA. In the report by Vaeck et al. (1987) supra, expression of chimeric genes containing the entire coding sequence of Bt2 were compared to those containing truncated Bt2 genes. Additionally, some T-DNA constructs included a chimeric NPTII gene

as a marker selectable in plants, whereas other constructs carried translational fusions between fragments of Bt2 and the NPTII gene. Insecticidal levels of toxin were produced when truncated Bt2 genes or fusion constructs were expressed in transgenic plants. Greenhouse grown plants produced  $\approx 0.02\%$  of the total soluble protein as the toxin, or  $3\mu\text{g}$  of toxin per g. fresh leaf tissue and, even at five-fold lower levels, showed 100% mortality in six-day feeding assays. However, no significant insecticidal activity could be obtained using the intact Bt2 coding sequence, despite the fact that the same promoter was used to direct its expression. Intact Bt2 protein and RNA yields in the transgenic plant leaves were 10 - 50 times lower than those for the truncated Bt2 polypeptides or fusion proteins.

Barton et al. (1987) Plant Physiol. 85:1103-1109 showed expression of a Bt protein in a system containing a 35S promoter, a viral (TMV) leader sequence, the Bt HD-1 4.5 kb gene (encoding a 645 amino acid protein followed by two proline residues) and a nopaline synthase (nos) poly(A)<sup>+</sup> sequence. Under these conditions expression was observed for Bt mRNA at levels up to  $47\text{ pg}/20\mu\text{g}$  RNA and  $12\text{ ng}/\text{mg}$  plant protein. This amount of Bt protein in plant tissue produced 100% mortality in two days. This level of expression still represents a low level of mRNA ( $2.5 \times 10^{-4}\%$ ) and protein ( $1.2 \times 10^{-3}\%$ ).

Various hybrid proteins consisting of N-terminal fragments of increasing length of the Bt2 protein fused to NPTII were produced in E. coli by Hofte et al. (1988) FEBS Lett. 226:364-370. Fusion proteins containing the first 607 amino acids of Bt2 exhibited insect toxicity; fusion proteins not containing this minimum N-terminal fragment were nontoxic. Appearance of NPTII activity was not dependent upon the presence of insecticidal activity; however, the conformation of the Bt2 polypeptide appeared to exert an important influence on the enzymatic activity of the fused NPTII protein. This study did suggest that the global 3-D structure of the Bt2 polypeptide is disturbed in truncated polypeptides.

A number of researchers have attempted to express plant genes in yeast (Neill et al. (1987) Gene 55:303-317; Rothstein et al. (1987) Gene 55:353-356; Coraggio et al. (1986) EMBO J. 5:459-465) and E. coli (Fuzakawa et al. (1987) FEBS Lett. 224:125-127; Vies et al. (1986) EMBO J. 5:2439-2444; Gatenby et al. (1987) Eur. J. Biochem. 168:227-231). In the case of wheat  $\alpha$ -gliadin (Neill et al. (1987) supra),  $\alpha$ -amylase (Rothstein et al. (1987) supra) genes, and maize zein genes (Coraggio et al. (1986) supra) in yeast, low levels of expression have been reported. Neill et al. have suggested that the low levels of expression of  $\alpha$ -gliadin in yeast may be due in part to codon usage bias, since  $\alpha$ -gliadin codons for Phe, Leu, Ser, Gly, Tyr and especially GIU do not correlate well with the abundant yeast isoacceptor tRNAs. In E. coli however, soybean glycinin A2 (Fuzakawa et al. (1987) supra) and wheat RuBPC SSU (Vies et al. (1986) supra; Gatenby et al. (1987) supra) are expressed adequately.

Not much is known about the makeup of tRNA populations in plants. Viotti et al. (1978) Biochim. Biophys. Acta 517:125-132 report that maize endosperm actively synthesizing zein, a storage protein rich in glutamine, leucine, and alanine, is characterized by higher levels of accepting activity for these three amino acids than are maize embryo tRNAs. This may indicate that the tRNA population of specific plant tissues may be adapted for optimum translation of highly expressed proteins such as zein. To our knowledge, no one has experimentally altered codon bias in highly expressed plant genes to determine possible effects of the protein translation in plants to check the effects on the level of expression.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is the overall object of the present invention to provide a means for plant protection against insect damage. The invention disclosed herein comprises a chemically synthesized gene encoding an insecticidal protein which is functionally equivalent to a native insecticidal protein of Bt. This synthetic gene is designed to be expressed in plants at a level higher than a native Bt gene. It is preferred that the synthetic gene be designed to be highly expressed in plants as defined herein. Preferably, the synthetic gene is at least approximately 85% homologous to an insecticidal protein gene of Bt.

It is a particular object of this invention to provide a synthetic structural gene coding for an insecticidal protein from Btt having, for example, the nucleotide sequences presented in Figure 1 and spanning nucleotides 1 through 1793 or spanning nucleotide 1 through 1833 with functional equivalence.

In designing synthetic Btt genes of this invention for enhanced expression in plants, the DNA sequence of the native Btt structural gene is modified in order to contain codons preferred by highly expressed plant genes, to attain an A+T content in nucleotide base composition substantially that found in plants, and also preferably to form a plant initiation sequence, and to eliminate sequences that cause destabilization, inappropriate polyadenylation, degradation and termination of RNA and to avoid sequences that constitute secondary structure hairpins and RNA splicing sites. In the synthetic genes, codons used to specify a given amino acid are selected with regard to the distribution frequency of codon usage employed in highly

expressed plant genes to specify that amino acid. As is appreciated by those skilled in the art, the distribution frequency of codon usage utilized in the synthetic gene is a determinant of the level of expression. Hence, the synthetic gene is designed such that its distribution frequency of codon usage deviates, preferably, no more than 25% from that of highly expressed plant genes and, more preferably, no more than about 10%. In addition, consideration is given to the percentage G + C content of the degenerate third base (monocotyledons appear to favor G + C in this position, whereas dicotyledons do not). It is also recognized that the XCG nucleotide is the least preferred codon in dicots whereas the XTA codon is avoided in both monocots and dicots. The synthetic genes of this invention also preferably have CG and TA doublet avoidance indices as defined in the Detailed Description closely approximating those of the chosen host plant. More preferably these indices deviate from that of the host by no more than about 10-15%.

Assembly of the Bt gene of this invention is performed using standard technology known to the art. The Bt structural gene designed for enhanced expression in plants of the specific embodiment is enzymatically assembled within a DNA vector from chemically synthesized oligonucleotide duplex segments. The synthetic Bt gene is then introduced into a plant host cell and expressed by means known to the art. The insecticidal protein produced upon expression of the synthetic Bt gene in plants is functionally equivalent to a native Bt crystal protein in having toxicity to the same insects.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

Figure 1 presents the nucleotide sequence for the synthetic Bt gene. Where different, the native sequence as found in p544Pst-Met5 is shown above. Changes in amino acids (underlined) occur in the synthetic sequence with alanine replacing threonine at residue 2 and leucine replacing the stop at residue 596 followed by the addition of 13-amino acids at the C-terminus.

Figure 2 represents a simplified scheme used in the construction of the synthetic Bt gene. Segments A through M represent oligonucleotide pieces annealed and ligated together to form DNA duplexes having unique splice sites to allow specific enzymatic assembly of the DNA segments to give the desired gene.

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram showing the assembly of oligonucleotide segments in the construction of a synthetic Bt gene. Each segment (A through M) is built from oligonucleotides of different sizes, annealed and ligated to form the desired DNA segment.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The following definitions are provided in order to provide clarity as to the intent or scope of their usage in the Specification and claims.

Expression refers to the transcription and translation of a structural gene to yield the encoded protein. The synthetic Bt genes of the present invention are designed to be expressed at a higher level in plants than the corresponding native Bt genes. As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, structural gene expression levels are affected by the regulatory DNA sequences (promoter, polyadenylation sites, enhancers, etc.) employed and by the host cell in which the structural gene is expressed. Comparisons of synthetic Bt gene expression and native Bt gene expression must be made employing analogous regulatory sequences and in the same host cell. It will also be apparent that analogous means of assessing gene expression must be employed in such comparisons.

Promoter refers to the nucleotide sequences at the 5' end of a structural gene which direct the initiation of transcription. Promoter sequences are necessary, but not always sufficient, to drive the expression of a downstream gene. In prokaryotes, the promoter drives transcription by providing binding sites to RNA polymerases and other initiation and activation factors. Usually promoters drive transcription preferentially in the downstream direction, although promotional activity can be demonstrated (at a reduced level of expression) when the gene is placed upstream of the promoter. The level of transcription is regulated by promoter sequences. Thus, in the construction of heterologous promoter/structural gene combinations, the structural gene is placed under the regulatory control of a promoter such that the expression of the gene is controlled by promoter sequences. The promoter is positioned preferentially upstream to the structural gene and at a distance from the transcription start site that approximates the distance between the promoter and the gene it controls in its natural setting. As is known in the art, some variation in this distance can be tolerated without loss of promoter function.

A gene refers to the entire DNA portion involved in the synthesis of a protein. A gene embodies the structural or coding portion which begins at the 5' end from the translational start codon (usually ATG) and extends to the stop (TAG, TGA or TAA) codon at the 3' end. It also contains a promoter region, usually

located 5' or upstream to the structural gene, which initiates and regulates the expression of a structural gene. Also included in a gene are the 3' end and poly(A) + addition sequences.

Structural gene is that portion of a gene comprising a DNA segment encoding a protein, polypeptide or a portion thereof, and excluding the 5' sequence which drives the initiation of transcription. The structural gene may be one which is normally found in the cell or one which is not normally found in the cellular location wherein it is introduced, in which case it is termed a heterologous gene. A heterologous gene may be derived in whole or in part from any source known to the art, including a bacterial genome or episome, eukaryotic, nuclear or plasmid DNA, cDNA, viral DNA or chemically synthesized DNA. A structural gene may contain one or more modifications in either the coding or the untranslated regions which could affect the biological activity or the chemical structure of the expression product, the rate of expression or the manner of expression control. Such modifications include, but are not limited to, mutations, insertions, deletions and substitutions of one or more nucleotides. The structural gene may constitute an uninterrupted coding sequence or it may include one or more introns, bounded by the appropriate splice junctions. The structural gene may be a composite of segments derived from a plurality of sources, naturally occurring or synthetic. The structural gene may also encode a fusion protein.

Synthetic gene refers to a DNA sequence of a structural gene that is chemically synthesized in its entirety or for the greater part of the coding region. As exemplified herein, oligonucleotide building blocks are synthesized using procedures known to those skilled in the art and are ligated and annealed to form gene segments which are then enzymatically assembled to construct the entire gene. As is recognized by those skilled in the art, functionally and structurally equivalent genes to the synthetic genes described herein may be prepared by site-specific mutagenesis or other related methods used in the art.

Transforming refers to stably introducing a DNA segment carrying a functional gene into an organism that did not previously contain that gene.

Plant tissue includes differentiated and undifferentiated tissues of plants, including but not limited to, roots, shoots, leaves, pollen, seeds, tumor tissue and various forms of cells in culture, such as single cells, protoplasts, embryos and callus tissue. The plant tissue may be in planta or in organ, tissue or cell culture.

Plant cell as used herein includes plant cells in planta and plant cells and protoplasts in culture.

Homology refers to identity or near identity of nucleotide or amino acid sequences. As is understood in the art, nucleotide mismatches can occur at the third or wobble base in the codon without causing amino acid substitutions in the final polypeptide sequence. Also, minor nucleotide modifications (e.g., substitutions, insertions or deletions) in certain regions of the gene sequence can be tolerated and considered insignificant whenever such modifications result in changes in amino acid sequence that do not alter functionality of the final product. It has been shown that chemically synthesized copies of whole, or parts of, gene sequences can replace the corresponding regions in the natural gene without loss of gene function. Homologs of specific DNA sequences may be identified by those skilled in the art using the test of cross-hybridization of nucleic acids under conditions of stringency as is well understood in the art (as described in Hames and Higgens (eds.) (1985) Nucleic Acid Hybridization, IRL Press, Oxford, UK). Extent of homology is often measured in terms of percentage of identity between the sequences compared.

Functionally equivalent refers to identity or near identity of function. A synthetic gene product which is toxic to at least one of the same insect species as a natural Bt protein is considered functionally equivalent thereto. As exemplified herein, both natural and synthetic Bt genes encode 65 kDa, insecticidal proteins having essentially identical amino acid sequences and having toxicity to coleopteran insects. The synthetic Bt genes of the present invention are not considered to be functionally equivalent to native Bt genes, since they are expressible at a higher level in plants than native Bt genes.

Frequency of preferred codon usage refers to the preference exhibited by a specific host cell in usage of nucleotide codons to specify a given amino acid. To determine the frequency of usage of a particular codon in a gene, the number of occurrences of that codon in the gene is divided by the total number of occurrences of all codons specifying the same amino acid in the gene. Table 1, for example, gives the frequency of codon usage for Bt genes, which was obtained by analysis of four Bt genes whose sequences are publicly available. Similarly, the frequency of preferred codon usage exhibited by a host cell can be calculated by averaging frequency of preferred codon usage in a large number of genes expressed by the host cell. It is preferable that this analysis be limited to genes that are highly expressed by the host cell.

Table 1, for example, gives the frequency of codon usage by highly expressed genes exhibited by dicotyledonous plants, and monocotyledonous plants. The dicot codon usage was calculated using 154 highly expressed coding sequences obtained from Genbank which are listed in Table 1. Monocot codon usage was calculated using 53 monocot nuclear gene coding sequences obtained from Genbank and listed in Table 1, located in Example 1.

When synthesizing a gene for improved expression in a host cell it is desirable to design the gene such

that its frequency of codon usage approaches the frequency of preferred codon usage of the host cell.

The percent deviation of the frequency of preferred codon usage for a synthetic gene from that employed by a host cell is calculated first by determining the percent deviation of the frequency of usage of a single codon from that of the host cell followed by obtaining the average deviation over all codons. As defined herein this calculation includes unique codons (i.e., ATG and TGG). The frequency of preferred codon usage of the synthetic Bt gene, whose sequence is given in Figure 1, is given in Table 1. The frequency of preferred usage of the codon 'GTA' for valine in the synthetic gene (0.10) deviates from that preferred by dicots (0.12) by  $0.02/0.12 = 0.167$  or 16.7%. The average deviation over all amino acid codons of the Bt synthetic gene codon usage from that of dicot plants is 7.8%. In general terms the overall average deviation of the codon usage of a synthetic gene from that of a host cell is calculated using the equation

$$n=1-Z \frac{\frac{X_n - Y_n}{X_n} \times 100}{Z}$$

where  $X_n$  = frequency of usage for codon n in the host cell;  $Y_n$  = frequency of usage for codon n in the synthetic gene. Where n represents an individual codon that specifies an amino acid, the total number of codons is Z, which in the preferred embodiment is 61. The overall deviation of the frequency of codon usage for all amino acids should preferably be less than about 25%, and more preferably less than about 10%.

Derived from is used to mean taken, obtained, received, traced, replicated or descended from a source (chemical and/or biological). A derivative may be produced by chemical or biological manipulation (including but not limited to substitution, addition, insertion, deletion, extraction, isolation, mutation and replication) of the original source.

Chemically synthesized, as related to a sequence of DNA, means that the component nucleotides were assembled in vitro. Manual chemical synthesis of DNA may be accomplished using well established procedures (Caruthers, M. (1983) in Methodology of DNA and RNA Sequencing, Weissman (ed.), Praeger Publishers, New York, Chapter 1), or automated chemical synthesis can be performed using one of a number of commercially available machines.

The term, designed to be highly expressed as used herein refers to a level of expression of a designed gene wherein the amount of its specific mRNA transcripts produced is sufficient to be quantified in Northern blots and, thus, represents a level of specific mRNA expressed corresponding to greater than or equal to approximately 0.001% of the poly(A)<sup>+</sup> mRNA. To date, natural Bt genes are transcribed at a level wherein the amount of specific mRNA produced is insufficient to be estimated using the Northern blot technique. However, in the present invention, transcription of a synthetic Bt gene designed to be highly expressed not only allows quantification of the specific mRNA transcripts produced but also results in enhanced expression of the translation product which is measured in insecticidal bioassays.

Crystal protein or insecticidal crystal protein or crystal toxin refers to the major protein component of the parasporal crystals formed in strains of Bt. This protein component exhibits selective pathogenicity to different species of insects. The molecular size of the major protein isolated from parasporal crystals varies depending on the strain of Bt from which it is derived. Crystal proteins having molecular weights of approximately 132, 65, and 28 kDa have been reported. It has been shown that the approximately 132 kDa protein is a protoxin that is cleaved to form an approximately 65 kDa toxin.

The crystal protein gene refers to the DNA sequence encoding the insecticidal crystal protein in either full length protoxin or toxin form, depending on the strain of Bt from which the gene is derived.

The authors of this invention observed that expression in plants of Bt crystal protein mRNA occurs at levels that are not routinely detectable in Northern blots and that low levels of Bt crystal protein expression correspond to this low level of mRNA expression. It is preferred for exploitation of these genes as potential biocontrol methods that the level of expression of Bt genes in plant cells be improved and that the stability of Bt mRNA in plants be optimized. This will allow greater levels of Bt mRNA to accumulate and will result in an increase in the amount of insecticidal protein in plant tissues. This is essential for the control of insects that are relatively resistant to Bt protein.

Thus, this invention is based on the recognition that expression levels of desired, recombinant insecticidal protein in transgenic plants can be improved via increased expression of stabilized mRNA transcripts; and that, conversely, detection of these stabilized RNA transcripts may be utilized to measure



expression of translational product (protein). This invention provides a means of resolving the problem of low expression of insecticidal protein RNA in plants and, therefore, of low protein expression through the use of an improved, synthetic gene specifying an insecticidal crystal protein from Bt.

Attempts to improve the levels of expression of Bt genes in plants have centered on comparative studies evaluating parameters such as gene type, gene length, choice of promoters, addition of plant viral untranslated RNA leader, addition of intron sequence and modification of nucleotides surrounding the initiation ATG codon. To date, changes in these parameters have not led to significant enhancement of Bt protein expression in plants. Applicants find that, surprisingly, to express Bt proteins at the desired level in plants, modifications in the coding region of the gene were effective. Structural-function relationships can be studied using site-specific mutagenesis by replacement of restriction fragments with synthetic DNA duplexes containing the desired nucleotide changes (Lo et al. (1984) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 81:2285-2289). However, recent advances in recombinant DNA technology now make it feasible to chemically synthesize an entire gene designed specifically for a desired function. Thus, the Btt coding region was chemically synthesized, modified in such a way as to improve its expression in plants. Also, gene synthesis provides the opportunity to design the gene so as to facilitate its subsequent mutagenesis by incorporating a number of appropriately positioned restriction endonuclease sites into the gene.

The present invention provides a synthetic Bt gene for a crystal protein toxic to an insect. As exemplified herein, this protein is toxic to coleopteran insects. To the end of improving expression of this insecticidal protein in plants, this invention provides a DNA segment homologous to a Btt structural gene and, as exemplified herein, having approximately 85% homology to the Btt structural gene in p544Pst-Met5. In this embodiment the structural gene encoding a Btt insecticidal protein is obtained through chemical synthesis of the coding region. A chemically synthesized gene is used in this embodiment because it best allows for easy and efficacious accommodation of modifications in nucleotide sequences required to achieve improved levels of cross-expression.

Today, in general, chemical synthesis is a preferred method to obtain a desired modified gene. However, to date, no plant protein gene has been chemically synthesized nor has any synthetic gene for a bacterial protein been expressed in plants. In this invention, the approach adopted for synthesizing the gene consists of designing an improved nucleotide sequence for the coding region and assembling the gene from chemically synthesized oligonucleotide segments. In designing the gene, the coding region of the naturally-occurring gene, preferably from the Btt subclone, p544Pst-Met5, encoding a 65 kDa polypeptide having coleopteran toxicity, is scanned for possible modifications which would result in improved expression of the synthetic gene in plants. For example, to optimize the efficiency of translation, codons preferred in highly expressed proteins of the host cell are utilized.

Bias in codon choice within genes in a single species appears related to the level of expression of the protein encoded by that gene. Codon bias is most extreme in highly expressed proteins of *E. coli* and yeast. In these organisms, a strong positive correlation has been reported between the abundance of an isoaccepting tRNA species and the favored synonymous codon. In one group of highly expressed proteins in yeast, over 96% of the amino acids are encoded by only 25 of the 61 available codons (Bennetzen and Hall (1982) J. Biol. Chem. 257:3026-3031).

These 25 codons are preferred in all sequenced yeast genes, but the degree of preference varies with the level of expression of the genes. Recently, Hoekema and colleagues (1987) Mol. Cell. Biol. 7:2914-2924 reported that replacement of these 25 preferred codons by minor codons in the 5' end of the highly expressed yeast gene PGK1 results in a decreased level of both protein and mRNA. They concluded that biased codon choice in highly expressed genes enhances translation and is required for maintaining mRNA stability in yeast. Without doubt, the degree of codon bias is an important factor to consider when engineering high expression of heterologous genes in yeast and other systems.

Experimental evidence obtained from point mutations and deletion analysis has indicated that in eukaryotic genes specific sequences are associated with posttranscriptional processing, RNA destabilization, translational termination, intron splicing and the like. These are preferably employed in the synthetic genes of this invention. In designing a bacterial gene for expression in plants, sequences which interfere with the efficacy of gene expression are eliminated.

In designing a synthetic gene, modifications in nucleotide sequence of the coding region are made to modify the A+T content in DNA base composition of the synthetic gene to reflect that normally found in genes for highly expressed proteins native to the host cell. Preferably the A+T content of the synthetic gene is substantially equal to that of said genes for highly expressed proteins. In genes encoding highly expressed plant proteins, the A+T content is approximately 55%. It is preferred that the synthetic gene have an A+T content near this value, and not sufficiently high as to cause destabilization of RNA and, therefore, lower the protein expression levels. More preferably, the A+T content is no more than about 60%

and most preferably is about 55%. Also, for ultimate expression in plants, the synthetic gene nucleotide sequence is preferably modified to form a plant initiation sequence at the 5' end of the coding region. In addition, particular attention is preferably given to assure that unique restriction sites are placed in strategic positions to allow efficient assembly of oligonucleotide segments during construction of the synthetic gene and to facilitate subsequent nucleotide modification. As a result of these modifications in coding region of the native Bt gene, the preferred synthetic gene is expressed in plants at an enhanced level when compared to that observed with natural Bt structural genes.

In specific embodiments, the synthetic Bt gene of this invention encodes a Bt protein toxic to coleopteran insects. Preferably, the toxic polypeptide is about 598 amino acids in length, is at least 75% homologous to a Bt polypeptide, and, as exemplified herein, is essentially identical to the protein encoded by p544Pst-Met5, except for replacement of threonine by alanine at residue 2. This amino acid substitution results as a consequence of the necessity to introduce a guanine base at position +4 in the coding sequence.

In designing the synthetic gene of this invention, the coding region from the Bt subclone, p544Pst-Met5, encoding a 65 kDa polypeptide having coleopteran toxicity, is scanned for possible modifications which would result in improved expression of the synthetic gene in plants. For example, in preferred embodiments, the synthetic insecticidal protein is strongly expressed in dicot plants, e.g., tobacco, tomato, cotton, etc., and hence, a synthetic gene under these conditions is designed to incorporate to advantage codons used preferentially by highly expressed dicot proteins. In embodiments where enhanced expression of insecticidal protein is desired in a monocot, codons preferred by highly expressed monocot proteins (given in Table 1) are employed in designing the synthetic gene.

In general, genes within a taxonomic group exhibit similarities in codon choice, regardless of the function of these genes. Thus an estimate of the overall use of the genetic code by a taxonomic group can be obtained by summing codon frequencies of all its sequenced genes. This species-specific codon choice is reported in this invention from analysis of 208 plant genes. Both monocot and dicot plants are analyzed individually to determine whether these broader taxonomic groups are characterized by different patterns of synonymous codon preference. The 208 plant genes included in the codon analysis code for proteins having a wide range of functions and they represent 6 monocot and 36 dicot species. These proteins are present in different plant tissues at varying levels of expression.

In this invention it is shown that the relative use of synonymous codons differs between the monocots and the dicots. In general, the most important factor in discriminating between monocot and dicot patterns of codon usage is the percentage G + C content of the degenerate third base. In monocots, 16 of 18 amino acids favor G + C in this position, while dicots only favor G + C in 7 of 18 amino acids.

The G ending codons for Thr, Pro, Ala and Ser are avoided in both monocots and dicots because they contain C in codon position II. The CG dinucleotide is strongly avoided in plants (Boudraa (1987) Genet. Sel. Evol. 19:143-154) and other eukaryotes (Grantham et al. (1985) Bull. Inst. Pasteur 83:95-148), possibly due to regulation involving methylation. In dicots, XCG is always the least favored codon, while in monocots this is not the case. The doublet TA is also avoided in codon positions II and III in most eukaryotes, and this is true of both monocots and dicots.

Grantham and colleagues (1986) Oxford Surveys in Evol. Biol. 3:48-81 have developed two codon choice indices to quantify CG and TA doublet avoidance in codon positions II and III. XCG/XCC is the ratio of codons having C as base II of G-ending to C-ending triplets, while XTA/XTT is the ratio of A-ending to T-ending triplets with T as the second base. These indices have been calculated for the plant data in this paper (Table 2) and support the conclusion that monocot and dicot species differ in their use of these dinucleotides.

Table 2

Avoidance of CG and TA doublets in codons position II-III.							
XCG/XCC and XTA/XAA values are multiplied by 100.							
Group	Plants	Dicots	Monocots	Maize	Soybean	RuBPC SSU	CAB
XCG/XCC	40	30	61	67	37	18	22
XTA/XTT	37	35	47	43	41	9	13
RuBPC SSU = ribulose 1,5 biphosphate small subunit							
CAB = chlorophyll a/b binding protein							

Additionally, for two species, soybean and maize, species-specific codon usage profiles were calculated (not shown). The maize codon usage pattern resembles that of monocots in general, since these sequences represent over half of the monocot sequences available. The codon profile of the maize subsample is even more strikingly biased in its preference for G + C in codon position III. On the other hand, the soybean codon usage pattern is almost identical to the general dicot pattern, even though it represents a much smaller portion of the entire dicot sample.

In order to determine whether the coding strategy of highly expressed genes such as the ribulose 1,5 biphosphate small subunit (RuBPC SSU) and chlorophyll a/b binding protein (CAB) is more biased than that of plant genes in general, codon usage profiles for subsets of these genes (19 and 17 sequences, respectively) were calculated (not shown). The RuBPC SSU and CAB pooled samples are characterized by stronger avoidance of the codons XCG and XTA than in the larger monocot and dicot samples (Table 2). Although most of the genes in these subsamples are dicot in origin (17/19 and 15/17), their codon profile resembles that of the monocots in that G + C is utilized in the degenerate base III.

The use of pooled data for highly expressed genes may obscure identification of species-specific patterns in codon choice. Therefore, the codon choices of individual genes for RuBPC SSU and CAB were tabulated. The preferred codons of the maize and wheat genes for RuBPC SSU and CAB are more restricted in general than are those of the dicot species. This is in agreement with Matsuoka *et al.* (1987) J. Biochem. 102:673-676) who noted the extreme codon bias of the maize RuBPC SSU gene as well as two other highly expressed genes in maize leaves, CAB and phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase. These genes almost completely avoid the use of A + T in codon position III, although this codon bias was not as pronounced in non-leaf proteins such as alcohol dehydrogenase, zein 22 kDa sub-unit, sucrose synthetase and ATP/ADP translocator. Since the wheat SSU and CAB genes have a similar pattern of codon preference, this may reflect a common monocot pattern for these highly expressed genes in leaves. The CAB gene for *Lemna* and the RuBPC SSU genes for *Chlamydomonas* share a similar extreme preference for G + C in codon position III. In dicot CAB genes, however, A + T degenerate bases are preferred by some synonymous codons (e.g., GCT for Ala, CTT for Leu, GGA and GGT for Gly). In general, the G + C preference is less pronounced for both RuBPC SSU and CAB genes in dicots than in monocots.

In designing a synthetic gene for expression in plants, attempts are also made to eliminate sequences which interfere with the efficacy of gene expression. Sequences such as the plant polyadenylation signals, e.g., AATAAA, polymerase II termination sequence, e.g., CAN<sub>(7-9)</sub>AGTNNAA, UCUUCGG hairpins and plant consensus splice sites are highlighted and, if present in the native *Btt* coding sequence, are modified so as to eliminate potentially deleterious sequences.

Modifications in nucleotide sequence of the *Btt* coding region are also preferably made to reduce the A + T content in DNA base composition. The *Btt* coding region has an A + T content of 64%, which is about 10% higher than that found in a typical plant coding region. Since A + T-rich regions typify plant intergenic regions and plant regulatory regions, it is deemed prudent to reduce the A + T content. The synthetic *Btt* gene is designed to have an A + T content of 55%, in keeping with values usually found in plants.

Also, a single modification (to introduce guanine in lieu of adenine) at the fourth nucleotide position in the *Btt* coding sequence is made in the preferred embodiment to form a sequence consonant with that believed to function as a plant initiation sequence (Taylor *et al.* (1987) Mol. Gen. Genet. 210:572-577) in optimization of expression. In addition, in exemplifying this invention thirty-nine nucleotides (thirteen codons) are added to the coding region of the synthetic gene in an attempt to stabilize primary transcripts.

However, it appears that equally stable transcripts are obtained in the absence of this extensive polypeptide containing thirty-nine nucleotides.

Not all of the above-mentioned modifications of the natural Bt gene must be made in constructing a synthetic Bt gene in order to obtain enhanced expression. For example, a synthetic gene may be synthesized for other purposes in addition to that of achieving enhanced levels of expression. Under these conditions, the original sequence of the natural Bt gene may be preserved within a region of DNA corresponding to one or more, but not all, segments used to construct the synthetic gene. Depending on the desired purpose of the gene, modification may encompass substitution of one or more, but not all, of the oligonucleotide segments used to construct the synthetic gene by a corresponding region of natural Bt sequence.

As is known to those skilled in the art of synthesizing genes (Mandecki et al. (1985) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 82:3543-3547; Feretti et al. (1986) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 83:599-603), the DNA sequence to be synthesized is divided into segment lengths which can be synthesized conveniently and without undue complication. As exemplified herein, in preparing to synthesize the Bt gene, the coding region is divided into thirteen segments (A - M). Each segment has unique restriction sequences at the cohesive ends. Segment A, for example, is 228 base pairs in length and is constructed from six oligonucleotide sections, each containing approximately 75 bases. Single-stranded oligonucleotides are annealed and ligated to form DNA segments. The length of the protruding cohesive ends in complementary oligonucleotide segments is four to five residues. In the strategy evolved for gene synthesis, the sites designed for the joining of oligonucleotide pieces and DNA segments are different from the restriction sites created in the gene.

In the specific embodiment, each DNA segment is cloned into a pIC-20 vector for amplification of the DNA. The nucleotide sequence of each fragment is determined at this stage by the dideoxy method using the recombinant phage DNA as templates and selected synthetic oligonucleotides as primers.

As exemplified herein and illustrated schematically in Figures 3 and 4, each segment individually (e.g., segment M) is excised at the flanking restriction sites from its cloning vector and spliced into the vector containing segment A. Most often, segments are added as a paired segment instead of as a single segment to increase efficiency. Thus, the entire gene is constructed in the original plasmid harboring segment A. The nucleotide sequence of the entire gene is determined and found to correspond exactly to that shown in Figure 1.

In preferred embodiments the synthetic Bt gene is expressed in plants at an enhanced level when compared to that observed with natural Bt structural genes. To that end, the synthetic structural gene is combined with a promoter functional in plants, the structural gene and the promoter region being in such position and orientation with respect to each other that the structural gene can be expressed in a cell in which the promoter region is active, thereby forming a functional gene. The promoter regions include, but are not limited to, bacterial and plant promoter regions. To express the promoter region/structural gene combination, the DNA segment carrying the combination is contained by a cell. Combinations which include plant promoter regions are contained by plant cells, which, in turn, may be contained by plants or seeds. Combinations which include bacterial promoter regions are contained by bacteria, e.g., Bt or E. coli. Those in the art will recognize that expression in types of micro-organisms other than bacteria may in some circumstances be desirable and, given the present disclosure, feasible without undue experimentation.

The recombinant DNA molecule carrying a synthetic structural gene under promoter control can be introduced into plant tissue by any means known to those skilled in the art. The technique used for a given plant species or specific type of plant tissue depends on the known successful techniques. As novel means are developed for the stable insertion of foreign genes into plant cells and for manipulating the modified cells, skilled artisans will be able to select from known means to achieve a desired result. Means for introducing recombinant DNA into plant tissue include, but are not limited to, direct DNA uptake (Paszowski, J. et al. (1984) EMBO J. 3:2717), electroporation (Fromm, M. et al. (1985) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 82:5824), microinjection (Crossway, A. et al. (1986) Mol. Gen. Genet. 202:179), or T-DNA mediated transfer from Agrobacterium tumefaciens to the plant tissue. There appears to be no fundamental limitation of T-DNA transformation to the natural host range of Agrobacterium. Successful T-DNA-mediated transformation of monocots (Hooykaas-Van Slogteren, G. et al. (1984) Nature 311:763), gymnosperm (Dandekar, A. et al. (1987) Biotechnology 5:587) and algae (Ausich, R., EPO application 108,580) has been reported. Representative T-DNA vector systems are described in the following references: An, G. et al. (1985) EMBO J. 4:277; Herrera-Estrella, L. et al. (1983) Nature 303:209; Herrera-Estrella, L. et al. (1983) EMBO J. 2:987; Herrera-Estrella, L. et al. (1985) in Plant Genetic Engineering, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 63. Once introduced into the plant tissue, the expression of the structural gene may be assayed by any means known to the art, and expression may be measured as mRNA transcribed or as protein synthesized. Techniques are known for the *in vitro* culture of plant tissue, and in a number of cases,

for regeneration into whole plants. Procedures for transferring the introduced expression complex to commercially useful cultivars are known to those skilled in the art.

In one of its preferred embodiments the invention disclosed herein comprises expression in plant cells of a synthetic insecticidal structural gene under control of a plant expressible promoter, that is to say, by inserting the insecticide structural gene into T-DNA under control of a plant expressible promoter and introducing the T-DNA containing the insert into a plant cell using known means. Once plant cells expressing a synthetic insecticidal structural gene under control of a plant expressible promoter are obtained, plant tissues and whole plants can be regenerated therefrom using methods and techniques well-known in the art. The regenerated plants are then reproduced by conventional means and the introduced genes can be transferred to other strains and cultivars by conventional plant breeding techniques.

The introduction and expression of the synthetic structural gene for an insecticidal protein can be used to protect a crop from infestation with common insect pests. Other uses of the invention, exploiting the properties of other insecticide structural genes introduced into other plant species will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. The invention in principle applies to introduction of any synthetic insecticide structural gene into any plant species into which foreign DNA (in the preferred embodiment T-DNA) can be introduced and in which said DNA can remain stably replicated. In general, these taxa presently include, but are not limited to, gymnosperms and dicotyledonous plants, such as sunflower (family Compositae), tobacco (family Solanaceae), alfalfa, soybeans and other legumes (family Leguminosae), cotton (family Malvaceae), and most vegetables, as well as monocotyledonous plants. A plant containing in its tissues increased levels of insecticidal protein will control less susceptible types of insect, thus providing advantage over present insecticidal uses of Bt. By incorporation of the insecticidal protein into the tissues of a plant, the present invention additionally provides advantage over present uses of insecticides by eliminating instances of nonuniform application and the costs of buying and applying insecticidal preparations to a field. Also, the present invention eliminates the need for careful timing of application of such preparations since small larvae are most sensitive to insecticidal protein and the protein is always present, minimizing crop damage that would otherwise result from preapplication larval foraging.

This invention combines the specific teachings of the present disclosure with a variety of techniques and expedients known in the art. The choice of expedients depends on variables such as the choice of insecticidal protein from a Bt strain, the extent of modification in preferred codon usage, manipulation of sequences considered to be destabilizing to RNA or sequences prematurely terminating transcription, insertions of restriction sites within the design of the synthetic gene to allow future nucleotide modifications, addition of introns or enhancer sequences to the 5' and/or 3' ends of the synthetic structural gene, the promoter region, the host in which a promoter region/structural gene combination is expressed, and the like. As novel insecticidal proteins and toxic polypeptides are discovered, and as sequences responsible for enhanced cross-expression (expression of a foreign structural gene in a given host) are elucidated, those of ordinary skill will be able to select among those elements to produce "improved" synthetic genes for desired proteins having agronomic value. The fundamental aspect of the present invention is the ability to synthesize a novel gene coding for an insecticidal protein, designed so that the protein will be expressed at an enhanced level in plants, yet so that it will retain its inherent property of insect toxicity and retain or increase its specific insecticidal activity.

## EXAMPLES

The following Examples are presented as illustrations of embodiments of the present invention. They do not limit the scope of this invention, which is determined by the claims.

The following strains were deposited with the Patent Culture Collection, Northern Regional Research Center, 1815 N. University Street, Peoria, Illinois 61604.

Strain	Deposited on	Accession #
<u>E. coli</u> MC1061 (p544-HindIII)	6 October 1987	NRRL B-18257
<u>E. coli</u> MC1061 (p544Pst-Met5)	6 October 1987	NRRL B-18258

The deposited strains are provided for the convenience of those in the art, and are not necessary to practice the present invention, which may be practiced with the present disclosure in combination with publicly available protocols, information, and materials. E. coli MC1061, a good host for plasmid transforma-

tions, was disclosed by Casadaban, M.J. and Cohen, S.N. (1980) J. Mol. Biol. 138:179-207.

#### Example 1: Design of the synthetic insecticidal crystal protein gene.

##### (i) Preparation of toxic subclones of the Bt gene

Construction, isolation, and characterization of pNSBP544 is disclosed by Sekar, V. et al. (1987) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 84:7036-7040, and Sekar, V. and Adang, M.J., U.S. patent application serial no. 108,285, filed October 13, 1987, which is hereby incorporated by reference. A 3.0 kbp HindIII fragment carrying the crystal protein gene of pNSBP544 is inserted into the HindIII site of pIC-2OH (Marsh, J.L. et al. (1984) Gene 32:481-485), thereby yielding a plasmid designated p544-HindIII, which is on deposit. Expression in *E. coli* yields a 73 kDa crystal protein in addition to the 65 kDa species characteristic of the crystal protein obtained from Bt isolates.

A 5.9 kbp BamHI fragment carrying the crystal protein gene is removed from pNSBP544 and inserted into BamHI-linearized pIC-2OH DNA. The resulting plasmid, p405/44-7, is digested with BglII and religated, thereby removing *Bacillus* sequences flanking the 3'-end of the crystal protein gene. The resulting plasmid, p405/54-12, is digested with PstI and religated, thereby removing *Bacillus* sequences flanking the 5'-end of the crystal protein and about 150 bp from the 5'-end of the crystal protein structural gene. The resulting plasmid, p405/81-4, is digested with SphI and PstI and is mixed with and ligated to a synthetic linker having the following structure:

```

                SD           MetThrAla
                5' CAGGATCCAACAATGACTGCA 3'
                3' GTACGTCCTAGGTTGTTACTG 5'
                SphI           PstI

```

(SD indicates the location of a Shine-Dalgarno prokaryotic ribosome binding site.) The resulting plasmid, p544Pst-Met5, contains a structural gene encoding a protein identical to one encoded by pNSBP544 except for a deletion of the amino-terminal 47 amino acid residues. The nucleotide sequence of the Bt coding region in p544Pst-Met5 is presented in Figure 1. In bioassays (Sekar and Adang, U.S. patent application serial no. 108,285, *supra*), the proteins encoded by the full-length Bt gene in pNSBP544 and the N-terminal deletion derivative, p544Pst-Met5, were shown to be equally toxic. All of the plasmids mentioned above have their crystal protein genes in the same orientation as the *lacZ* gene of the vector.

##### (ii) Modification of preferred codon usage

Table 1 presents the frequency of codon usage for (A) dicot proteins, (B) Bt proteins, (C) the synthetic Bt gene, and (D) monocot proteins. Although some codons for a particular amino acid are utilized to approximately the same extent by both dicot and Bt proteins (e.g., the codons for serine), for the most part, the distribution of codon frequency varies significantly between dicot and Bt proteins, as illustrated in columns A and B in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Codon Usage

5	Amino Acid	Codon	Distribution Fraction			
			(A) Dicot Genes	(B) Bt Genes	(C) Synthetic Btt Gene	(D) Monocot Genes
10	Gly	GGG	0.12	0.08	0.13	0.21
	Gly	GGA	0.37	0.53	0.37	0.18
	Gly	GGT	0.35	0.24	0.34	0.21
15	Gly	GGC	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.40
	Glu	GAG	0.52	0.13	0.52	0.77
	Glu	GAA	0.48	0.87	0.48	0.23
	Asp	GAT	0.57	0.68	0.56	0.31
20	Asp	GAC	0.43	0.32	0.44	0.69
	Val	GTG	0.30	0.15	0.30	0.38
	Val	GTA	0.12	0.32	0.10	0.07
	Val	GTT	0.38	0.29	0.35	0.20
25	Val	GTC	0.20	0.24	0.25	0.34
	Ala	GCG	0.05	0.12	0.06	0.20
	Ala	GCA	0.26	0.50	0.24	0.16
	Ala	GCT	0.42	0.32	0.41	0.28
30	Ala	GCC	0.28	0.06	0.29	0.36
	Lys	AAG	0.61	0.13	0.58	0.87
	Lys	AAA	0.39	0.87	0.42	0.13
	Asn	AAT	0.45	0.79	0.44	0.23
35	Asn	AAC	0.55	0.21	0.56	0.77
	Met	ATG	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Ile	ATA	0.19	0.30	0.20	0.09
	Ile	ATT	0.44	0.57	0.43	0.27
40	Ile	ATC	0.36	0.13	0.37	0.64
	Thr	ACG	0.07	0.14	0.07	0.18
	Thr	ACA	0.27	0.68	0.27	0.14
	Thr	ACT	0.36	0.14	0.34	0.22
45	Thr	ACC	0.31	0.05	0.32	0.47
	Trp	TGG	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	End	TGA	0.46	0.00	0.00	0.34
	Cys	TGT	0.43	0.33	0.33	0.27
50	Cys	TGC	0.57	0.67	0.67	0.73
	End	TAG	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.44
	End	TAA	0.37	1.00	1.00	0.22
	Tyr	TAT	0.42	0.81	0.43	0.19
55	Tyr	TAC	0.58	0.19	0.57	0.81

Table 1 (CONTINUED)

Amino Acid	Codon	Distribution Fraction			
		(A)Dicot Genes	(B)Bt Genes	(C)Synthetic Btt Gene	(D)Monocot Genes
Phe	TTT	0.45	0.75	0.44	0.28
Phe	TTC	0.55	0.25	0.56	0.72
Ser	AGT	0.14	0.25	0.13	0.07
Ser	AGC	0.18	0.13	0.19	0.25
Ser	TCG	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.13
Ser	TCA	0.18	0.19	0.17	0.13
Ser	TCT	0.26	0.25	0.27	0.18
Ser	TCC	0.19	0.10	0.17	0.24
Arg	AGG	0.22	0.09	0.23	0.28
Arg	AGA	0.31	0.50	0.32	0.08
Arg	CGG	0.04	0.14	0.05	0.14
Arg	CGA	0.09	0.14	0.09	0.04
Arg	CGT	0.23	0.09	0.23	0.11
Arg	CGC	0.11	0.05	0.09	0.36
Gln	CAG	0.38	0.18	0.39	0.43
Gln	CAA	0.62	0.82	0.61	0.57
His	CAT	0.52	0.90	0.50	0.38
His	CAC	0.48	0.10	0.50	0.62
Leu	TTG	0.26	0.08	0.27	0.15
Leu	TTA	0.10	0.46	0.12	0.04
Leu	CTG	0.09	0.04	0.10	0.27
Leu	CTA	0.08	0.21	0.10	0.11
Leu	CTT	0.29	0.15	0.18	0.16
Leu	CTC	0.19	0.06	0.22	0.27
Pro	CCG	0.07	0.20	0.08	0.20
Pro	CCA	0.44	0.56	0.44	0.39
Pro	CCT	0.32	0.24	0.32	0.19
Pro	CCC	0.16	0.00	0.16	0.22

Bt coding sequences publicly available and 88 coding sequences of dicot nuclear genes were used to compile the codon usage table. The pooled dicot coding sequences, obtained from Genbank, were:



Table 1 (CONTINUED)

5

	GENUS/ SPECIES	GENBANK	PROTEIN	REF
	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	AMACHS	Chalcone synthase	
10	<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	AT1G1ADH	Alcohol dehydrogenase	
		ATHH3GA	Histone 3 gene 1	
		ATHH3GB	Histone 3 gene 2	
		ATHH4GA	Histone 4 gene 1	
		ATHH1ICP1	CAB	
		ATHH1UBA	$\alpha$ tubulin	
15			5-enolpyruvyl4-hisate 3-phosphate synthetase	1
	<i>Bertholletia excelsa</i>		High methionine storage protein	2
	<i>Brassica campestris</i>		Acyl carrier protein	3
	<i>Brassica napus</i>	BNANAP	Napin	
	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	BOLSLSGR	S-locus specific glycoprotein	
20	<i>Canavalia ensiformis</i>	CENCONA	Concanavalin A	
	<i>Carica papaya</i>	CPAPAP	Papain	
	<i>Chlamydomonas reinhardtii</i>	CREC5S2	Preapocytochrome	
		CRERBCS1	RuBPC small subunit gene 1	
		CRERBCS2	RuBPC small subunit gene 2	
25	<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>	CUCPIIT	Phytochrome	
	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	CUSCMS	Glyoxosomal malate synthetase	
		CUSLHCPA	CAB	
		CUSSSU	RuBPC small subunit	
	<i>Daucus carota</i>	DAREXT	Extensin	
		DAREXTR	33 kD extensin related protein	
30	<i>Dolichos biflorus</i>	DBILECS	seed lectin	
	<i>Flaveria trinervia</i>	FTRBCR	RuBPC small subunit	
	<i>Glycine max</i>	SOYTSAA	7S storage protein	
		SOYACTIG	Actin 1	
		SOYCIIM	CI1 protease inhibitor	
		SOYGLYAL	Glycinin A1a Bx subunits	
35		SOYGLYAB	Glycinin A5A4B3 subunits	
		SOYGLYAB	Glycinin A3/b4 subunits	
		SOYGLYR	Glycinin A2B1a subunits	
		SOYHSP175	Low M W heat shock proteins	
		SOYLGBI	Leghemoglobin	
		SOYLEA	Lectin	
		SOYLOX	Lipoxygenase 1	
40		SOYNOD20G	20 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD23G	23 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD24H	24 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD26B	26 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD26R	26 kDa nodulin	
45		SOYNOD27R	27 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD35M	35 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNOD75	75 kDa nodulin	
		SOYNODR1	Nodulin C51	
		SOYNODR2	Nodulin E27	
		SOYTRP1	Proline rich protein	
50		SOYRUBP	RuBPC small subunit	
		SOYURA	Urease	
		SOYHSP26A	Heat shock protein 26A	
			Nuclear-encoded chloroplast heat shock protein	4
			22 kDa nodulin	5
55			$\beta$ 1 tubulin	6
			$\beta$ 2 tubulin	6

## TABLE 1 (continued)

	GENUS/ SPECIES	GENBANK	PROTEIN	REF
5	<i>Cucurbitur</i>		Seed $\alpha$ phlobulin (vicilin)	7
			Seed $\beta$ phlobulin (vicilin)	7
	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	HNNRUBCS	RuBPC small subunit	11
			2S albumin seed storage protein	9
	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>		Wound-induced catalase	9
	<i>Lemna gibba</i>	LG1A019	CAB	
10		LG1R501C	RuBPC small subunit	
	<i>Lupinus luteus</i>	LUTLBR	leghemoglobin I	
	<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i>	TOMDIOBR	Biotin binding protein	
		TOMETHYBR	Ethylene biosynthesis protein	
		TOMPG2AR	Polygalacturonase-2a	
		TOMPSI	Tomato photosystem I protein	
15		TOMRBCSA	RuBPC small subunit	
		TOMRBCSB	RuBPC small subunit	
		TOMRBCSC	RuBPC small subunit	
		TOMRBCSD	RuBPC small subunit	
		TOMRRD	Ripening related protein	
		TOMWIPIC	Wound induced proteinase inhibitor I	
20		TOMWIPII	Wound induced proteinase inhibitor II	10
			CAB 1A	10
			CAB 1B	10
			CAB 3C	10
			CAB 4	11
25			CAB 5	11
	<i>Medicago sativa</i>	ALFLB3R	Leghemoglobin III	
	<i>Mesembryanthemum crystallinum</i>		RuBPC small subunit	12
	<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	TOBATT21	Mitochondrial ATP synthase $\beta$ subunit	
30			Nitrate reductase	13
			Glutamine synthetase	14
	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	TOBECH	Endochitinase	
		TOBGAPA	A subunit of chloroplast G3PD	
		TOBGAPB	B subunit of chloroplast G3PD	
35		TOBGAPC	C subunit of chloroplast G3PD	
		TOBPRIAR	Pathogenesis related protein 1a	
		TOBPRIAR	Pathogenesis-related protein 1c	
		TOBPRIAR	Pathogenesis related protein 1b	
		TOBPXOLF	Peroxidase	
		TOBRBPCO	RuBPC small subunit	
40		TOBTIAUR	TMV-induced protein homologous to thaumatin	
	<i>Pennisetum americanum</i>	AVOCEL	Cellulase	
	<i>Pennisetum americanum</i>	PIIOCIIL	Chalcone synthase	
	<i>Petunia sp.</i>	PETCAB13	CAB 13	
45		PETCAB22L	CAB 22L	
		PETCAB22R	CAB 22R	
		PETCAB25	CAB 25	
		PETCAB37	CAB 37	
		PETCAB91R	CAB 91R	
		PETCIISR	Chalcone synthase	
		PETGCRI	Glycine-rich protein	
50		PETRBCS08	RuBPC small subunit	
		PETRBCS11	RuBPC small subunit	
	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>	PIIVCHM	70 kDa heat shock protein	15
		PIIVDLECA	Chitinase	
		PIIVDLECD	Phytohemagglutinin E	
55		PIIVGSR1	Phytohemagglutinin L	
		PIIVGSR2	Glutamine synthetase 1	
			Glutamine synthetase 2	

Table 1 (CONTINUED)

5	GENUS/ SPECIES	GENBANK	PROTEIN	REF
		PIHVLBA	Leghemoglobin	
		PIHVECT	Lectin	
		PIHVTAL	Phenylalanine ammonia lyase	
10		PIHVIHASAR	$\alpha$ phaseolin	
		PIHVIHASBR	$\beta$ phaseolin	16
			Arcein seed protein	17
			Chalcone synthase	
	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	PEAALB2	Seed albumin	
		PEACAB80	CAB	
		PEAGSR1	Glutamine synthetase (nodule)	
15		PEALECA	Lectin	
		PEALEGA	Legumin	
		PEARUBPS	RuBPC small subunit	
		PEAVIC2	Vicilin	
		PEAVIC4	Vicilin	
		PEAVIC7	Vicilin	
20			Alcohol dehydrogenase I	18
			Glutamine synthetase (leaf)	19
			Glutamine synthetase (root)	19
			Histone I	20
			Nuclear encoded chloroplast	4
			heat shock protein	
			RuBPC small subunit	21
25	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	RCCAGG	Agglutinin	
	<i>Ricinus communis</i>	RCCRICIN	Ricin	
		RCCICL4	Isocitrate lyase	
	<i>Silene pratensis</i>	SIPFDX	Ferredoxin precursor	
		SIPPCY	Plastocyanin precursor	
	<i>Sinapis alba</i>	SALGAPDII	Nuclear gene for G3PD	
30	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i>	POTPAT	Pastatin	
		POTINHVI	Wound-induced proteinase	
			inhibitor	
		POTLS1G	Light-inducible tissue specific	
			ST-LS1 gene	
		POTPI2G	Wound-induced proteinase	
			inhibitor II	
35		POTRBCS	RuBPC small subunit	22
			Sucrose synthetase	
	<i>Spinacia oleracea</i>	SPIACPI	Acyl carrier protein I	
		SPIOEC16	16 kDa photosynthetic	
			oxygen-evolving protein	
		SPIOEC23	23 kDa photosynthetic	
			oxygen-evolving protein	
40		SPMPCG	Plastocyanin	
		SPMPS3	33 kDa photosynthetic water	
			oxidation complex precursor	
			Glycolate oxidase	23
	<i>Vicia faba</i>	VFALBA	Leghemoglobin	
45		VFALEB4	Legumin B	24
			Vicillin	

Pooled 53 monocot coding sequences obtained from Genbank (release 55) or, when no Genbank file name is specified, directly from the published source, were:

Table 1 (CONTINUED)

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GENUS/SPECIES	GENBANK	PROTEIN	REF
<i>Avena sativa</i>	ASTAP3R	Phytochrome 3	
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	BLYALR	Aleurain	
	BLYAMY1	$\alpha$ amylase 1	
	BLYAMY2	$\alpha$ amylase 2	
	BLYCHORD1	Hordein C	
	BLYGLUCB	$\beta$ glucanase	
	BLYHORB	B1 hordein	
	BLYTAPI	Amylase/protease inhibitor	
	BLYTHIAR	Toxin $\alpha$ hordothionin	
	BLYUBIQR	Ubiquitin	25
		Histone 3	26
		Leaf specific thionin 1	26
		Leaf specific thionin 2	27
		Plastocyanin	
<i>Oryza sativa</i>	RICGLUTG	Glutelin	28
		Glutelin	
<i>Triticum aestivum</i>	WHTAMYA	$\alpha$ amylase	
	WHTCAB	CAB	
	WHTEMR	Em protein	
	WHTGIR	gibberellin responsive protein	
	WHTGLGB	$\gamma$ gliadin	
	WHTGLIABA	$\alpha/\beta$ gliadin Class AII	
	WHTGLUTI	High MW glutenin	
	WHTH3	Histone 3	
	WHTH4091	Histone 4	
	WHTRBCB	RuBPC small subunit	
<i>Secale cereale</i>	RYESECGR	$\gamma$ secalin	
<i>Zea mays</i>	MZEALG	40.1 kD A1 protein (NADPH-dependent reductase)	
	MZEACTIG	Actin	
	MZEADH11F	Alcohol dehydrogenase 1	
	MZEADH2NR	Alcohol dehydrogenase 2	
	MZEALD	Aldolase	
	MZEANT	ATP/ADP translocator	
	MZEEG2R	Glutelin 2	
	MZEGGST3B	Glutathione S transferase	
	MZEH3C1	Histone 3	
	MZEH4C14	Histone 4	
	MZEHSP701	70 kD Heat shock protein, exon 1	
	MZEHSP702	70 kD Heat shock protein, exon 2	
	MZEI1ICP	CAB	
	MZEMPL3	Lipid body surface protein L3	
	MZEPEPCR	Phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase	
	MZERBCS	RuBPC small subunit	
	MZESUSYSG	Sucrose synthetase	
	MZETP12	Triosephosphate isomerase 1	
	MZEZE20M	19 kD zein	
	MZEZE20M	19 kD zein	
	MZEZE15A3	15 kD zein	
	MZEZE16	16 kD zein	
	MZEZE19A	19 kD zein	
	MZEZE22A	22 kD zein	
	MZEZE22B	22 kD zein	29
		Catalase 2	30
		Regulatory C1 locus	

Table 1 (CONTINUED)

Bt codons were obtained from analysis of coding sequences of the following genes: Bt var. kurstaki HD-73, 6.6kb HindIII fragment (Kronstad et al. (1983) J. Bacteriol. 154:419-428); Bt var. kurstaki HD-1, 5.3 kb fragment (Adang et al. (1987) in Biotechnology in Invertebrate Pathology and Cell Culture, K. Maramorosh (ed.), Academic Press, Inc. New York, pp. 85-99); Bt var. kurstaki HD-1, 4.5 kb fragment (Schnepf and Whiteley (1985) J. Biol. Chem. 260:6273-6280); and Bt var. tenebrionis, 3.0 kb HindIII fragment (Sekar et al. (1987) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 84:7036-7040).

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Table 1 (CONTINUED)

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For example, dicots utilize the AAG codon for lysine with a frequency of 61% and the AAA codon with a frequency of 39%. In contrast, in *Bt* proteins the lysine codons AAG and AAA are used with a frequency of 13% and 87%, respectively. It is known in the art that seldom used codons are generally detrimental to that system and must be avoided or used judiciously. Thus, in designing a synthetic gene encoding the *Btt* crystal protein, individual amino acid codons found in the original *Btt* gene are altered to reflect the codons preferred by dicot genes for a particular amino acid. However, attention is given to maintaining the overall distribution of codons for each amino acid within the coding region of the gene. For example, in the case of alanine, it can be seen from Table 1 that the codon GCA is used in *Bt* proteins with a frequency of 50%, whereas the codon GCT is the preferred codon in dicot proteins. In designing the synthetic *Btt* gene, not all codons for alanine in the original *Bt* gene are replaced by GCT; instead, only some alanine codons are changed to GCT while others are replaced with different alanine codons in an attempt to preserve the overall distribution of codons for alanine used in dicot proteins. Column C in Table 1 documents that this goal is achieved; the frequency of codon usage in dicot proteins (column A) corresponds very closely to that used in the synthetic *Btt* gene (column C).

In similar manner, a synthetic gene coding for insecticidal crystal protein can be optimized for enhanced expression in monocot plants. In Table 1, column D, is presented the frequency of codon usage of highly expressed monocot proteins.

Because of the degenerate nature of the genetic code, only part of the variation contained in a gene is expressed in this protein. It is clear that variation between degenerate base frequencies is not a neutral phenomenon since systematic codon preferences have been reported for bacterial, yeast and mammalian genes. Analysis of a large group of plant gene sequences indicates that synonymous codons are used

differently by monocots and dicots. These patterns are also distinct from those reported for *E. coli* yeast and man.

In general, the plant codon usage pattern more closely resembles that of man and other higher eukaryotes than unicellular organisms, due to the overall preference for G + C content in codon position III. Monocots in this sample share the most commonly used codon for 13 of 18 amino acids as that reported for a sample of human genes (Grantham et al. (1986) *supra*), although dicots favor the most commonly used human codon in only 7 of 18 amino acids.

Discussions of plant codon usage have focused on the differences between codon choice in plant nuclear genes and in chloroplasts. Chloroplasts differ from higher plants in that they encode only 30 tRNA species. Since chloroplasts have restricted their tRNA genes, the use of preferred codons by chloroplast-encoded proteins appears more extreme. However, a positive correlation has been reported between the level of isoaccepting tRNA for a given amino acid and the frequency with which this codon is used in the chloroplast genome (Pfitzinger et al. (1987) *Nucl. Acids Res.* 15:1377-1386).

Our analysis of the plant genes sample confirms earlier reports that the nuclear and chloroplast genomes in plants have distinct coding strategies. The codon usage of monocots in this sample is distinct from chloroplast usage, sharing the most commonly used codon for only 1 of 18 amino acids. Dicots in this sample share the most commonly used codon of chloroplasts in only 4 of 18 amino acids. In general, the chloroplast codon profile more closely resembles that of unicellular organisms, with a strong bias towards the use of A + T in the degenerate third base.

In unicellular organisms, highly expressed genes use a smaller subset of codons than do weakly expressed genes although the codons preferred are distinct in some cases. Sharp and Li (1986) *Nucl. Acids Res.* 14:7734-7749 report that codon usage in 165 *E. coli* genes reveals a positive correlation between high expression and increased codon bias. Bennetzen and Hall (1982) *supra* have described a similar trend in codon selection in yeast. Codon usage in these highly expressed genes correlates with the abundance of isoaccepting tRNAs in both yeast and *E. coli*. It has been proposed that the good fit of abundant yeast and *E. coli* mRNA codon usage to isoacceptor tRNA abundance promotes high translation levels and high steady state levels of these proteins. This strongly suggests that the potential for high levels of expression of plant genes in yeast or *E. coli* is limited by their codon usage. Hoekema et al. (1987) *supra* report that replacement of the 25 most favored yeast codons with rare codons in the 5' end of the highly expressed gene PGK1 leads to a decrease in both mRNA and protein. These results indicate that codon bias should be emphasized when engineering high expression of foreign genes in yeast and other systems.

### (iii) Sequences within the Btt coding region having potentially destabilizing influences

Analysis of the Btt gene reveals that the A + T content represents 64% of the DNA base composition of the coding region. This level of A + T is about 10% higher than that found in a typical plant coding region. Most often, high A + T regions are found in intergenic regions. Also, many plant regulatory sequences are observed to be AT-rich. These observations lead to the consideration that an elevated A + T content within the Btt coding region may be contributing to a low expression level in plants. Consequently, in designing a synthetic Btt gene, the A + T content is decreased to more closely approximate the A + T levels found in plant proteins. As illustrated in Table 3, the A + T content is lowered to a level in keeping with that found in coding regions of plant nuclear genes. The synthetic Btt gene of this invention has an A + T content of 55%.

Table 3

Adenine + Thymine Content in Btt Coding Region						
Coding Region	Base				% G + C	% A + T
	G	A	T	C		
Natural Btt gene	341	633	514	306	36	64
Synthetic Btt gene	392	530	483	428	45	55

In addition, the natural *Bt* gene is scanned for sequences that are potentially destabilizing to *Bt* RNA. These sequences, when identified in the original *Bt* gene, are eliminated through modification of nucleotide sequences. Included in this group of potentially destabilizing sequences are:

(a) plant polyadenylation signals (as described by Joshi (1987) Nucl. Acids Res. 15:9627-9640). In eukaryotes, the primary transcripts of nuclear genes are extensively processed (steps including 5' capping, intron splicing, polyadenylation) to form mature and translatable mRNAs. In higher plants, polyadenylation involves endonucleolytic cleavage at the polyA site followed by the addition of several A residues to the cleaved end. The selection of the polyA site is presumed to be cis-regulated. During expression of *Bt* protein and RNA in different plants, the present inventors have observed that the polyadenylated mRNA isolated from these expression systems is not full-length but instead is truncated or degraded. Hence, in the present invention it was decided to minimize possible destabilization of RNA through elimination of potential polyadenylation signals within the coding region of the synthetic *Bt* gene. Plant polyadenylation signals including AATAAA, AATGAA, AATAAT, AATATT, GATAAA, GATAAA, and AATAAG motifs do not appear in the synthetic *Bt* gene when scanned for 0 mismatches of the sequences.

(b) polymerase II termination sequence, CAN<sub>7-9</sub>AGTNNA. This sequence was shown (Vankan and Filipowicz (1988) EMBO J. 7:791-799) to be next to the 3' end of the coding region of the U2 snRNA genes of *Arabidopsis thaliana* and is believed to be important for transcription termination upon 3' end processing. The synthetic *Bt* gene is devoid of this termination sequence.

(c) CUUCGG hairpins, responsible for extraordinarily stable RNA secondary structures associated with various biochemical processes (Tuerk et al. (1988) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 85:1364-1368). The exceptional stability of CUUCGG hairpins suggests that they have an unusual structure and may function in organizing the proper folding of complex RNA structures. CUUCGG hairpin sequences are not found with either 0 or 1 mismatches in the *Bt* coding region.

(d) plant consensus splice sites, 5' = AAG:GTAAGT and 3' = TTTT(Pu)TTT(Pu)T(Pu)T(Pu)T(Pu)-TGCAG:C, as described by Brown et al. (1986) EMBO J. 5:2749-2758. Consensus sequences for the 5' and 3' splice junctions have been derived from 20 and 30 plant intron sequences, respectively. Although it is not likely that such potential splice sequences are present in *Bt* genes, a search was initiated for sequences resembling plant consensus splice sites in the synthetic *Bt* gene. For the 5' splice site, the closest match was with three mismatches. This gave 12 sequences of which two had G:GT. Only position 948 was changed because 1323 has the KpnI site needed for reconstruction. The 3'-splice site is not found in the synthetic *Bt* gene.

Thus, by highlighting potential RNA-destabilizing sequences, the synthetic *Bt* gene is designed to eliminate known eukaryotic regulatory sequences that effect RNA synthesis and processing.

## Example 2. Chemical synthesis of a modified *Bt* structural gene

### (i) Synthesis Strategy

The general plan for synthesizing linear double-stranded DNA sequences coding for the crystal protein from *Bt* is schematically simplified in Figure 2. The optimized DNA coding sequence (Figure 1) is divided into thirteen segments (segments A-M) to be synthesized individually, isolated and purified. As shown in Figure 2, the general strategy begins by enzymatically joining segments A and M to form segments AM to which is added segment BL to form segment ABLM. Segment CK is then added enzymatically to make segment ABCKLM which is enlarged through addition of segments DJ, EI and RFH sequentially to give finally the total segment ABCDEFGHIJKLM, representing the entire coding region of the *Bt* gene.

Figure 3 outlines in more detail the strategy used in combining individual DNA segments in order to effect the synthesis of a gene having unique restriction sites integrated into a defined nucleotide sequence. Each of the thirteen segments (A to M) has unique restriction sites at both ends, allowing the segment to be strategically spliced into a growing DNA polymer. Also, unique sites are placed at each end of the gene to enable easy transfer from one vector to another.

The thirteen segments (A to M) used to construct the synthetic gene vary in size. Oligonucleotide pairs of approximately 75 nucleotides each are used to construct larger segments having approximately 225 nucleotide pairs. Figure 3 documents the number of base pairs contained within each segment and specifies the unique restriction sites bordering each segment. Also, the overall strategy to incorporate specific segments at appropriate splice sites is detailed in Figure 3.



(ii) Preparation of oligodeoxynucleotides

Preparation of oligodeoxynucleotides for use in the synthesis of a DNA sequence comprising a gene for Bt is carried out according to the general procedures described by Matteucci et al. (1981) J. Am. Chem. Soc. 103:3185-3192 and Baur et al. (1981) Tetrahedron Lett. 22:1859-1862. All oligonucleotides are prepared by the solid-phase phosphoramidite triester coupling approach, using an Applied Biosystems Model 380A DNA synthesizer. Deprotection and cleavage of the oligomers from the solid support are carried out according to standard procedures. Crude oligonucleotide mixtures are purified using an oligonucleotide purification cartridge (OTC, Applied Biosystems) as described by McBride et al. (1988) Biotechniques 6:362-367.

5'-phosphorylation of oligonucleotides is performed with T4 polynucleotide kinase. The reaction contains 2 µg oligonucleotide and 18.2 units polynucleotide kinase (Pharmacia) in linker kinase buffer (Maniatis (1982) Cloning Manual, Fritsch and Sambrook (eds.), Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor, NY). The reaction is incubated at 37°C for 1 hour.

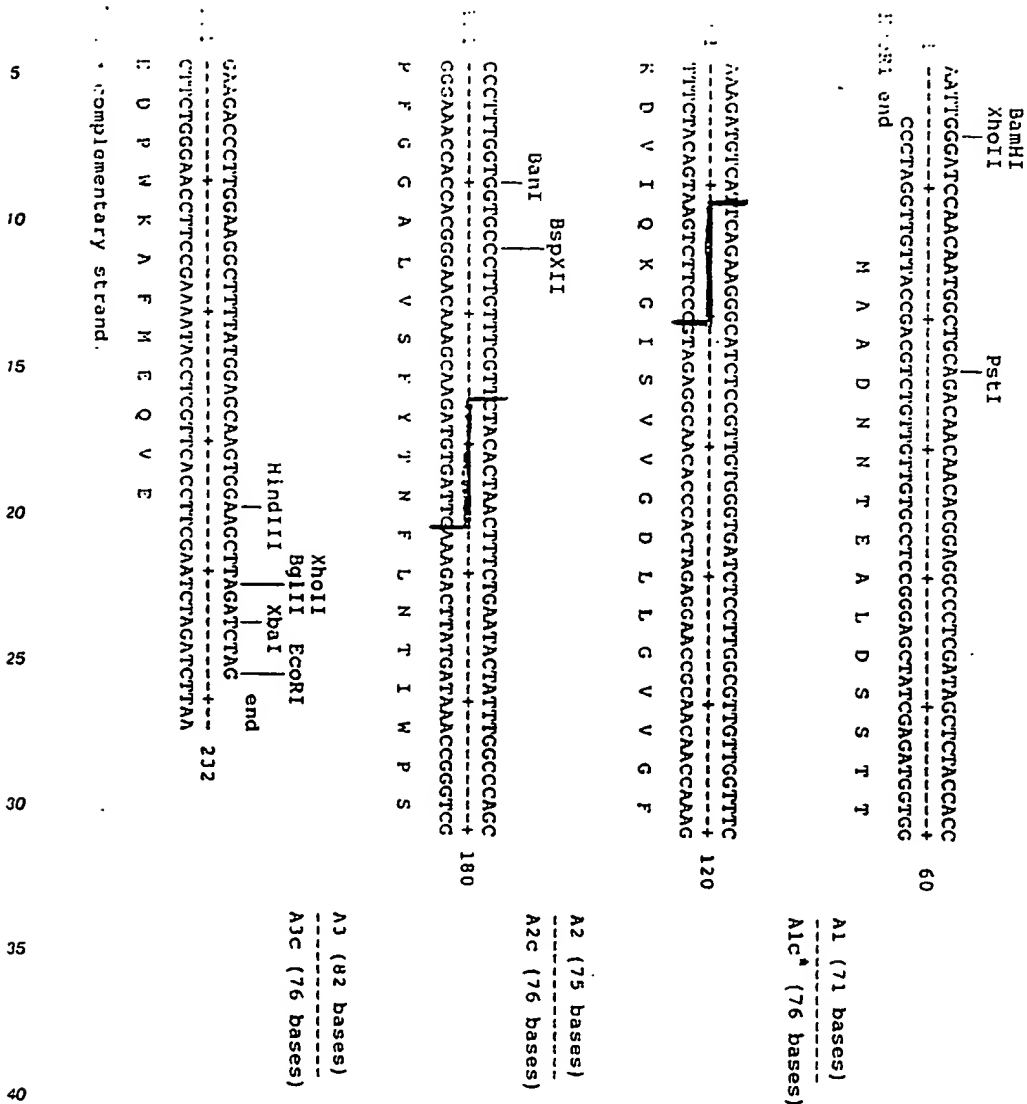
Oligonucleotides are annealed by first heating to 95°C for 5 min. and then allowing complementary pairs to cool slowly to room temperature. Annealed pairs are reheated to 65°C, solutions are combined, cooled slowly to room temperature and kept on ice until used. The ligated mixture may be purified by electrophoresis through a 4% NuSieve agarose (FMC) gel. The band corresponding to the ligated duplex is excised, the DNA is extracted from the agarose and ethanol precipitated.

Ligations are carried out as exemplified by that used in M segment ligations. M segment DNA is brought to 65°C for 25 min, the desired vector is added and the reaction mixture is incubated at 65°C for 15 min. The reaction is slowly cooled over 1-1/2 hours to room temperature. ATP to 0.5mM and 3.5 units of T4 DNA ligase salts are added and the reaction mixture is incubated for 2 hr at room temperature and then maintained overnight at 15°C. The next morning, vectors which had not been ligated to M block DNA were removed upon linearization by EcoRI digestion. Vectors ligated to the M segment DNA are used to transform E. coli MC1061. Colonies containing inserted blocks are identified by colony hybridization with <sup>32</sup>P-labelled oligonucleotide probes. The sequence of the DNA segment is confirmed by isolating plasmid DNA and sequencing using the dideoxy method of Sanger et al. (1977) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 74:5463-5467.

(iii) Synthesis of Segment AM

Three oligonucleotide pairs (A1 and its complementary strand A1c, A2 and A2C and A3 and A3C) are assembled and ligated as described above to make up segment A. The nucleotide sequence of segment A is as follows:

FIG. 1. Nucleotide Sequence of Segment A



In Table 4, bold lines demarcate the individual oligonucleotides. Fragment A1 contains 71 bases, A1c has 76 bases, A2 has 75 bases, A2c has 76 bases, A3 has 82 bases and A3c has 76 bases. In all, segment A is composed of 228 base pairs and is contained between EcoRI restriction enzyme site and one destroyed EcoRI site (5')J. (Additional restriction sites within Segment A are indicated.) The EcoRI single-stranded cohesive ends allow segment A to be annealed and then ligated to the EcoRI-cut cloning vector, pIC20K.

Segment M comprises three oligonucleotide pairs: M1, 80 bases, M1c, 86 bases, M2, 87 bases, M2c, 87 bases, M3, 85 bases and M3c 79 bases. The individual oligonucleotides are annealed and ligated according to standard procedures as described above. The overall nucleotide sequence of segment M is:

Table 5. Nucleotide Sequence of Segment M

EcoRI HindIII BamHI BglIII	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000 1001 1002 1003 1004 1005 1006 1007 1008 1009 1010 1011 1012 1013 1014 1015 1016 1017 1018 1019 1020 1021 1022 1023 1024 1025 1026 1027 1028 1029 1030 1031 1032 1033 1034 1035 1036 1037 1038 1039 1040 1041 1042 1043 1044 1045 1046 1047 1048 1049 1050 1051 1052 1053 1054 1055 1056 1057 1058 1059 1060 1061 1062 1063 1064 1065 1066 1067 1068 1069 1070 1071 1072 1073 1074 1075 1076 1077 1078 1079 1080 1081 1082 1083 1084 1085 1086 1087 1088 1089 1090 1091 1092 1093 1094 1095 1096 1097 1098 1099 1100 1101 1102 1103 1104 1105 1106 1107 1108 1109 1110 1111 1112 1113 1114 1115 1116 1117 1118 1119 1120 1121 1122 1123 1124 1125 1126 1127 1128 1129 1130 1131 1132 1133 1134 1135 1136 1137 1138 1139 1140 1141 1142 1143 1144 1145 1146 1147 1148 1149 1150 1151 1152 1153 1154 1155 1156 1157 1158 1159 1160 1161 1162 1163 1164 1165 1166 1167 1168 1169 1170 1171 1172 1173 1174 1175 1176 1177 1178 1179 1180 1181 1182 1183 1184 1185 1186 1187 1188 1189 1190 1191 1192 1193 1194 1195 1196 1197 1198 1199 1200 1201 1202 1203 1204 1205 1206 1207 1208 1209 1210 1211 1212 1213 1214 1215 1216 1217 1218 1219 1220 1221 1222 1223 1224 1225 1226 1227 1228 1229 1230 1231 1232 1233 1234 1235 1236 1237 1238 1239 1240 1241 1242 1243 1244 1245 1246 1247 1248 1249 1250 1251 1252 1253 1254 1255 1256 1257 1258 1259 1260 1261 1262 1263 1264 1265 1266 1267 1268 1269 1270 1271 1272 1273 1274 1275 1276 1277 1278 1279 1280 1281 1282 1283 1284 1285 1286 1287 1288 1289 1290 1291 1292 1293 1294 1295 1296 1297 1298 1299 1300 1301 1302 1303 1304 1305 1306 1307 1308 1309 1310 1311 1312 1313 1314 1315 1316 1317 1318 1319 1320 1321 1322 1323 1324 1325 1326 1327 1328 1329 1330 1331 1332 1333 1334 1335 1336 1337 1338 1339 1340 1341 1342 1343 1344 1345 1346 1347 1348 1349 1350 1351 1352 1353 1354 1355 1356 1357 1358 1359 1360 1361 1362 1363 1364 1365 1366 1367 1368 1369 1370 1371 1372 1373 1374 1375 1376 1377 1378 1379 1380 1381 1382 1383 1384 1385 1386 1387 1388 1389 1390 1391 1392 1393 1394 1395 1396 1397 1398 1399 1400 1401 1402 1403 1404 1405 1406 1407 1408 1409 1410 1411 1412 1413 1414 1415 1416 1417 1418 1419 1420 1421 1422 1423 1424 1425 1426 1427 1428 1429 1430 1431 1432 1433 1434 1435 1436 1437 1438 1439 1440 1441 1442 1443 1444 1445 1446 1447 1448 1449 1450 1451 1452 1453 1454 1455 1456 1457 1458 1459 1460 1461 1462 1463 1464 1465 1466 1467 1468 1469 1470 1471 1472 1473 1474 1475 1476 
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protein under controlled conditions in amounts up to 10% of the total bacterial protein. This promoter functions in many gram-negative bacteria including *E. coli* and *Pseudomonas*.

Production of Bt insecticidal crystal protein from the synthetic gene in bacteria demonstrates that the protein produced has the expected toxicity to coleopteran insects. These recombinant bacterial strains in themselves have potential value as microbial insecticides, product of the synthetic gene.

#### Example 4. Expression of a synthetic crystal protein gene in plants

The synthetic Bt crystal protein gene is designed to facilitate cloning into the expression cassettes. These utilize sites compatible with the BamHI and BglII restriction sites flanking the synthetic gene. Cassettes are available that utilize plant promoters including CaMV 35S, CaMV 19S and the ORF 24 promoter from T-DNA. These cassettes provide the recognition signals essential for expression of proteins in plants. These cassettes are utilized in the micro Ti plasmids such as pH575. Plasmids such as pH575 containing the synthetic Bt gene directed by plant expression signals are utilized in disarmed *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* to introduce the synthetic gene into plant genomic DNA. This system has been described previously by Adang et al. (1987) to express Bt var. *kurstaki* crystal protein gene in tobacco plants. These tobacco plants were toxic to feeding tobacco hornworms.

#### Example 5. Assay for insecticidal activity

Bioassays were conducted essentially as described by Sekar, V. et al. supra. Toxicity was assessed by an estimate of the LD<sub>50</sub>. Plasmids were grown in *E. coli* JM105 (Yanisch-Perron, C. et al. (1985) Gene 33:103-119). On a molar basis, no significant differences in toxicity were observed between crystal proteins encoded by p544Pst-Met5, p544-HindIII, and pNSBP544. When expressed in plants under identical conditions, cells containing protein encoded by the synthetic gene were observed to be more toxic than those containing protein encoded by the native Bt gene. Immunoblots ("western" blots) of cell cultures indicated that those that were more toxic had more crystal protein antigen. Improved expression of the synthetic Bt gene relative to that of a natural Bt gene was seen as the ability to quantitate specific mRNA transcripts from expression of synthetic Bt genes on Northern blot assays.

#### Claims

1. A synthetic gene designed to be highly expressed in plants comprising a DNA sequence encoding an insecticidal protein which is functionally equivalent to a native insecticidal protein of Bt.
2. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein said DNA sequence is at least about 85% homologous to a native insecticidal protein gene of Bt.
3. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein said DNA sequence is that presented in Figure 1, spanning nucleotides 1 through 1793.
4. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein said DNA sequence is that presented in Figure 1 spanning nucleotides 1 through 1833.
5. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein the overall frequency of preferred codon usage within the entire coding region of said synthetic gene is within about 75% of the frequency of codon usage preferred in plants.
6. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein the A+T base content of said DNA sequence is substantially equal to the A+T base content found in plant structural genes.
7. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein a plant initiation sequence is present at the 5' end of the coding region.
8. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein plant polyadenylation signals, comprising those having AATAAA, AATGAA, AATAAT, AATATT, GATAAA, GATAAA and AATAAG motifs, are eliminated in said DNA sequence.
9. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein the polymerase II termination sequence, CAN<sub>7-9</sub>AGTNNA, is eliminated in said DNA sequence.
10. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein CUUCGG hairpins are eliminated in said DNA sequence.
11. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein plant consensus splice sites, including 5' = AAG:GTAAGT and 3' = TTTT(Pu)TTT(Pu)T(Pu)T(Pu)TGACAG:C, are eliminated in said DNA sequence.

12. A synthetic gene of claim 1 wherein the CG and TA doublet avoidance indices are substantially equal to that of highly expressed genes in the selected host plant.

13. A recombinant DNA cloning vector comprising said synthetic gene of claim 1.

14. A plant cell which contains the synthetic gene of claim 1.

5 15. An improved method of producing a protein toxic to an insect comprising the step of introducing into a host plant cell a DNA segment comprising a synthetic gene designed to be highly expressed in plants comprising a DNA sequence encoding an insecticidal protein which is functionally equivalent to a native insecticidal protein of Bt such that said synthetic gene is expressed in said plant host.

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A T T T A A A A A A T A A A  
 1 ATGGCTGCAGACAACACCGAGGCCCTCGATAGCTCTACCACCAAAGATGTCATTGCAAGGGCATCTCCGTGTGGGTGATCTCCTTGGCGTTGTG 100  
 M A A D M N T E A L D S S T T K Q V I O K G I S V V G D L L G V V G  
 G A G T T A T A A T G G A A G A A A  
 101 GTTCCCTTTGGTGGTGCCTTGTTCCTTCTACACTAATTTCTGAATACTATTGGCCAGCGAAGACCTTGGAAAGCCTTTATGGAGCAAGTGCA 200  
 F P F G G A L V S F Y T N F L N T I V P S E O P V K A F H E Q V E  
 A A A A T A T A A T A T A  
 201 AGCTTTGATGGATCAGAAGATCGCTGATTATGCAAGAACAAGCTCTTGTGAGCTCCAGGCGCTTCAGAACAACTGCGAAGATTATGTGAGTGCACTG 300  
 A L M D Q K I A D Y A K H K A L A E L Q G L Q N H V E D Y V S A L  
 A G T G A A A A T A A T A T A T A T A T A T A  
 301 AGTTCATGGCAAAAGATCCTGTCTCAGCAATCCACATAGCCAGGGGGCATAGGGAGCTGTTCTCTCAAGCAGAAAGTCACTTCGGAAATTCAA 400  
 S S W Q K N P V S S R N P H S Q G R I R E L F S Q A E S H F R N S H  
 G A T A A A A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A  
 401 TGCCCTCCTTTGCCATCTCTGGGTACGAGTTCTCTTCTTACAACCTAGCTCAAGCTGCCAACACACATCTGTTCTTACTAAAAGACGCTCAATCTA 500  
 P S F A I S G Y E V L F L T T Y A Q A A N T H L F L L K D A Q I Y  
 A A A T A T A A A G A A A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A  
 501 TGGTGAAGATGGGATACGAGAAAGATATCGCTGAGTTCTACAAGCGTCACTAAAAGTACTCAAGAGTATACTGACCACCTGTGTCAATGGTAT 600  
 G E E W G Y E K E D I A E F Y K R Q L K L T Q E Y T D H C V K W Y  
 A A A A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A  
 601 AATGTTGGATTGGATAAGTTGAGAGGTTTCATCTATGAATCTTGGGTAACCTTAAACCGGTACCGCAGAGAGATGACATTGACAGTGCTCGACTTGATTG 700  
 N V G L D K L R G S S Y E S W V W F N R Y R R E M T L T V L D L I A  
 G A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 701 CACTATTCCATTGTATGATGTTGACTCTACCCAAAGGAGGTTAAACCGAATTGACTAGAGACGTTTAAACCGATCCCATTTGCGGAGTCAACAACT 800  
 L F P L Y D V R L Y P K E V K T E L T R D V L T D P I V G V N H L  
 T G T T A A A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A T A  
 801 CAGAGGCTACCGAAACCTTCTCTAACATAGAAACTACATTCTGTAACACACATCTATTGCACTATCTGCACAGAAATTCAGTTTCAACCGCGTCCAA 900  
 R G Y G T T F S M I E N Y I R K P H L F D Y L H R I O F H T R F Q  
 T A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 901 CCAGGATCTATGGAATGACTCTTCACTATTGGTCCGGTAATTATGTTCACTAGACCCAGCATAGGATCTAATGACATCATCACTCTCCATTCT 1000  
 P G Y Y G M D S F W Y V S G N Y V S T R P S I G S N D I I T S P F Y  
 T A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1001 ACCGAAACAGTCTCCGAGCGTGTGCAAACTTGGAGTTAATGGAGAGAAAGTCTATAGAGCGGTGGCCAAATACCAATCTTGGCGTCTGGCGGTCGGC 1100  
 G N K S S E P V Q N L E F N G E K V Y R A V A N T M L A V W P S A  
 A T A A A T A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1101 TGTGACTCAGGTGTACCAAGTGAATTCAGCAATCAATGATCAGACAGATGAAGCAAGTACTCAACTTACGACTCAAGAGGAATGTTGGCGCG 1200  
 V Y S G V T K V E F S Q Y N D Q T D E A S T O T Y D S K R M V G A  
 T G A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1201 GTCAGCTGGGATTCTATCGATCACTCCCTCCAGAAACACCGATGAACCTCTAGAGAAGGTTATAGCCATCAACTCAATTACGTAATGTGCTTCTCA 1300  
 V S V D S I D Q L P P E T T D E P L E K G Y S N O L N Y V M C F L H  
 A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1301 TGCAGGGTAGTAGAGGTACCATCCAGTGTAACTTGGACTCACAAGAGTGTAGACTTCTTCAACATGATTGATCCAAAAGATTACTCAACTCCGTT 1400  
 Q G S R G T I P V L T M T H K S V O F F N M I D S K K I T Q L P L  
 A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1401 GGTAAAGGCTACAAGTTACAATCTGGTCTCCGTTGTGCGAGGTCCTAGGTTACAGGAGGAGATATCATTCAATGCACTGAGAATGGGTCCGCGGCA 1500  
 V K A T K L Q S G A S V V A G P R F T G G D I I Q C T E N G S A A  
 T G A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1501 ACTATCTACGTTACACCTGATGTGCTGACTCTCAAAAGTATCGTGTAGATTGATTGCTTCTACCTCTCAGATAACATTCACTAAGCTTGGACG 1600  
 T I Y V T P D V S Y S Q K Y R A R I N Y A S T S Q I T F T L S L O G  
 A T T T A G A T A A T T A T A A A A A A A A A A  
 1601 GGGCTCCATTCAACCAATACTACTTCGATAAGACCATCAACAAGGAGACACACTCAGGTATAATTCACTTCACTTACGAGCTTCACTCCATTCGA 1700  
 A P F N Q T Y F D K T I N K G D T L T Y M S F N L A S F S T P F E  
 A T A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
 1701 ATTGTACGGGAACAACCTTGCAATAGGCGTCACAGGATTGAGTGTGGTCAAGGTTTACATCGACAAGATTGAGTTCACTCCAGTGAACCTTAGGTC 1800  
 L S G N H L Q I G V T G L S A G D K V Y I D K I E F I P V N L R S  
 CCAGGAACCGAGCTTGAGTTTCATCGACATCTAG  
 1801 P G T E L E F I D I \*

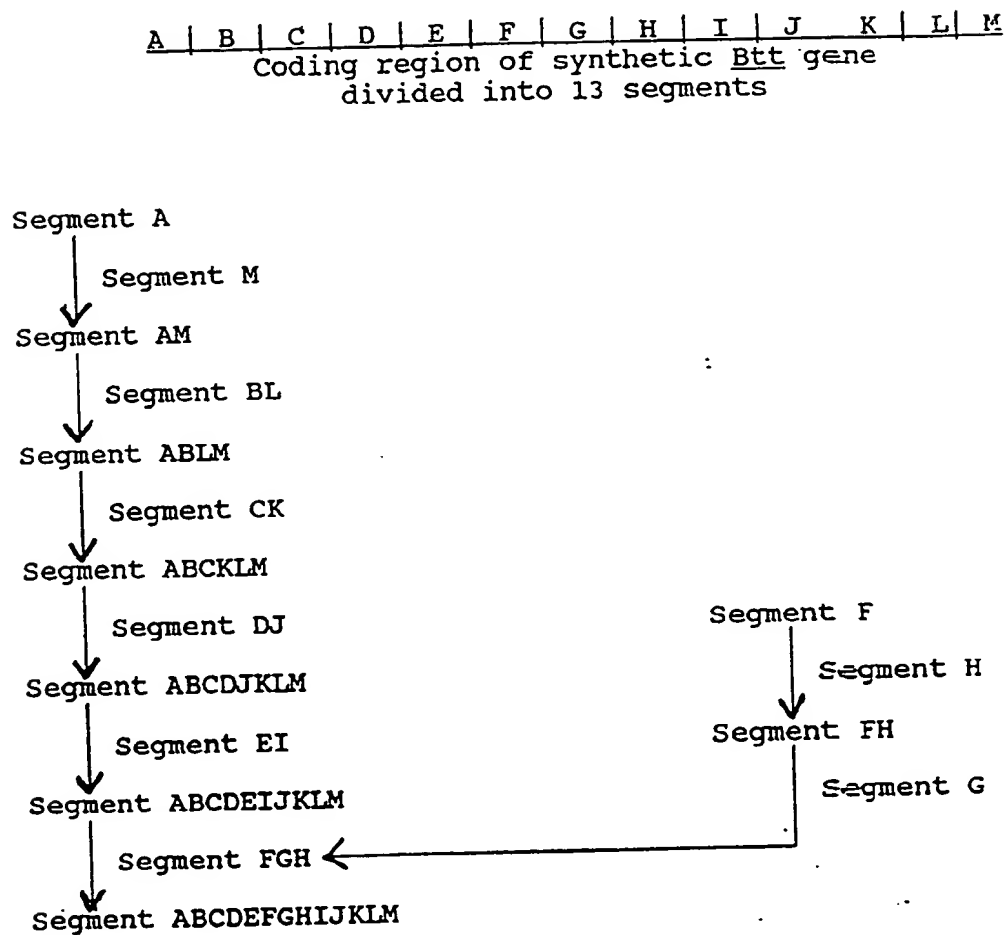
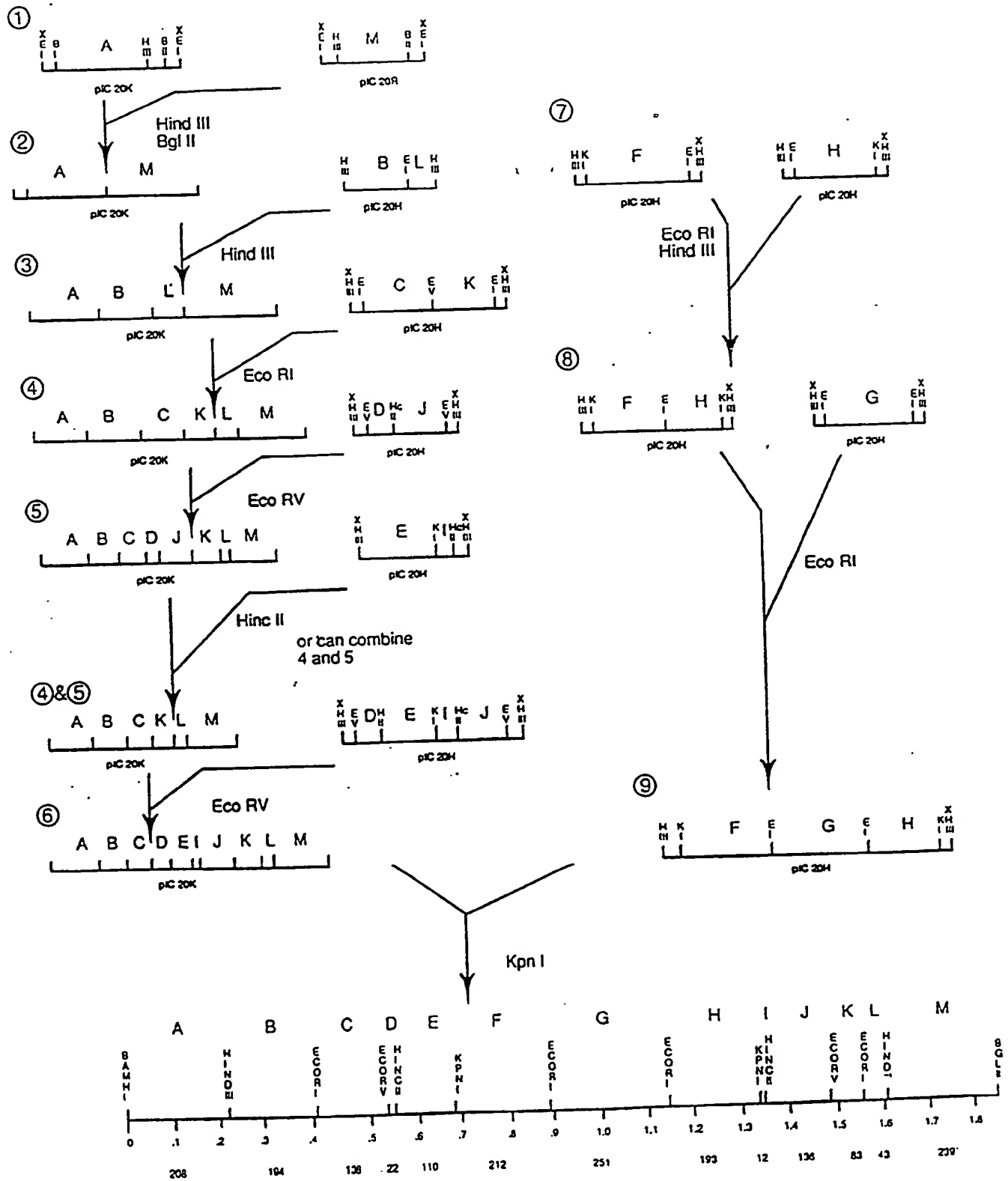
Figure 2. Simplified Scheme for Synthesis of Ett Gene

FIGURE 3





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⑤④ **Synthetic insecticidal crystal protein gene.**

⑤⑦ Synthetic Bacillus thuringiensis toxin genes designed to be expressed in plants at a level higher than naturally-occurring Bt genes are provided. These genes utilize codons preferred in highly expressed monocot or dicot proteins.

**EP 0 359 472 A3**



European Patent  
Office

# EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 89 30 9069

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 03-04-1990	Examiner JULIA P.
<b>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</b> X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			



DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
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			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 03-04-1990	Examiner JULIA P.
<b>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</b> X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons ----- & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

